



**HOW PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN EAST JERUSALEM
BALANCE THEIR DUAL ROLES AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISES, WITH A FOCUS ON FUNDING,
TUITION POLICIES, AND EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL
STANDARDS. IT INVESTIGATES THESE DYNAMICS WITHIN A
POLITICALLY CONTESTED AND INSTITUTIONALLY
FRAGMENTED ENVIRONMENT**

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine how private schools in East Jerusalem balance their role as educational institutions with an educational and social mission against their role as private entities striving for financial sustainability. The study is situated within a complex educational landscape shaped by political, economic, and social factors, where private schools have become an integral part of the education system amidst limited public resources and a growing demand for high-quality education. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving interviews with all educational stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and parents, to identify challenges and examine policies regarding fees, funding, and educational standards. The study interpreted the behavior of educational institutions in East Jerusalem based on the vision of institution owners and their management of resources. The results indicate that school fees are the primary source of funding for private schools in Jerusalem, with limited reliance on external sources. Nevertheless, most private schools adopt a flexible policy regarding fees to ensure educational equity. The study revealed a range of challenges- most notably financial pressures, rising operational costs, a multiplicity of education oversight bodies, and disparities in curricula and educational standards- alongside political and administrative constraints affecting school operations while highlighting the ongoing effort to maintain educational quality and cultural identity. The study concludes that private schools in East Jerusalem do not operate based on a purely profit-driven logic; rather, they function according to a hybrid model that combines an educational mission, social responsibility, and financial sustainability. Consequently, striking a balance among these dimensions stands as the primary challenge determining their future and their role in the development of education.

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1. Introduction

The privatization of education has emerged as one of the most significant global trends reshaping educational systems over the past four decades, leading to the emergence of hybrid models that combine market practices with the traditional responsibilities of the public sector (Ball, 2007; Verger et al., 2016).

This trend emerged as a result of neoliberal reforms and austerity policies that reinforced the role of market mechanisms in the provision of public services (Harvey, 2005; Robertson & Verger, 2012). While proponents argue that privatization enhances efficiency and innovation and expands parental choice (Tooley, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 1990), critics warn of exacerbating social inequalities and undermining the concept of education as a public good (Apple, 2001; Carnoy & Levin, 1985).

In East Jerusalem, these global shifts intersect with a unique political and legal context involving multiple administrative and funding entities including the Israeli Ministry of Education, the Palestinian National Authority, UNRWA, and religious and private institutions (Abu-Lughod, 2018; Jabareen, 2017). Amidst this institutional fragmentation, private schools play a pivotal role in filling the gaps left by public systems; yet, they simultaneously operate as private enterprises that rely primarily on tuition fees to ensure financial sustainability, often in the absence of adequate government support (Arar, 2012).

The way private schools balance their educational and national role, acting as incubators of identity with their role as economic entities striving for sustainability, remains poorly understood and inconsistently implemented. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the strategies adopted by private schools in East Jerusalem to balance their educational mission with market demands, focusing on funding mechanisms, tuition policies, and educational standards.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Shifts in the Privatization of Education and Theoretical Frameworks

The privatization of education is a global phenomenon that has led to the emergence of hybrid models combining market-based practices with the traditional responsibilities of the public sector (Ball, 2007; Verger et al., 2016). This shift is dependent on the following theories:

- a) **Theory of Public and Private Goods:** Education is generally viewed as a public good; however, there has been a recent shift toward treating it as a private commodity subject to market mechanisms. Consequently, education in Jerusalem

reflects this dual nature as a pillar of community resilience (Jerusalem Unit, 2018). This transformation of education from a public service into a commercial commodity gives rise to a conflict between the social dimension and the economic role of the school (Rind, 2023).

- b) **Neoliberalism:** This theory advocates for reducing the role of the state and fostering competition (Ball, 2007)—part of the global reshaping of educational policies based on efficiency and market accountability (Edwards & Means, 2019)
- c) **New Institutional Economics:** This perspective highlights the role of rules, regulations, and governance in shaping institutional performance, as schools operate not merely based on economic efficiency but also in response to social and political pressures (North, 1990).
- d) **Stakeholder Theory:** This theory emphasizes the importance of coordination among students, parents, the administration, and funders to ensure sustainability, particularly in complex environments such as East Jerusalem (Jerusalem Unit, 2018).

2.2 Motives and Models of Privatization

The privatization of education arises from a lack of public resources and the need to bridge service gaps (Jerusalem Unit, 2018). Motivations for privatizing education also include public sector shortcomings and financial constraints, as policies have contributed to reduced investment in infrastructure and public services (Alyan, Sela, & Pomerantz, 2021). Education privatization takes various forms, including competition-based quasi-market models (Lexki, 2023) and public-private partnership models (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2022).

2.3 The State of Education in Israel and the Arab Sector

Israel's education system is undergoing a gradual transition from a "provider state" model to a "regulatory state" model that enhances the role of the private sector (Yagil-Levy, 2024). However, the Arab sector faces deep disparities, as Arab schools suffer from a shortage of classrooms, overcrowding, and a lack of resources (Blass, 2017). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the fragility of the education system in resource-constrained Arab communities became clearly evident (Tachotcho & Kalisher, 2022).

2.4 The Distinctive Nature of Education in East Jerusalem (Fragmentation of Identity and Administration)

In East Jerusalem, there is a multiplicity of bodies responsible for administration and funding, resulting in a complex educational landscape (Abu-Lughod, 2018; Jabareen, 2017). This is evident in the following:

- a) **Curricula and Cultural Conflict:** Symbolic conflict plays a significant role, as policies aimed at the "Israelization" of curricula have impacted the national culture of teachers and students (Abu Ghazaleh, 2021; Okumuş et al., 2019). Furthermore,

the authorities impose strict censorship on Palestinian curricula, utilizing them as a political tool to reshape the educational landscape (Olayan, 2021).

- b) **Spatial challenges:** Urban policies impose restrictions on urban expansion, limiting the ability of educational institutions to develop their infrastructure (Adalah, 2022).

2.5 Private Schools in East Jerusalem: Balancing Mission and Market

Private schools operate as enterprises that rely primarily on tuition fees to ensure their continuity in the absence of stable government financial support (Arar, 2012); this is evident through:

- a) **Financial Sustainability:** These schools face the dilemma of balancing operating costs against parents' limited ability to pay due to high poverty rates (LED, 2017).
- b) **Fee and Support Policies:** Schools adopt flexible policies such as fee waivers for orphans, sibling discounts, and installment plans to support families with limited financial means (Faisal Hussein Foundation, 2022).
- c) **Educational Standards and Quality:** Quality is considered a competitive advantage, as schools invest in technology such as the installation of smart boards to enhance performance (Daaboul, 2025).

2.6 Consequences and Outcomes (Between Quality and Inequality)

The privatization of education yields mixed results; while proponents argue that it enhances efficiency and innovation and expands parental choice (Tooley, 2001; Chubb & Moe, 1990), others warn that it may exacerbate social inequalities and undermine the concept of education as a public good (Apple, 2001; Carnoy & Levin, 1985). However, studies confirm that private schools often excel in terms of resource quality and class size, making them a preferred choice despite the cost (Baloch, 2021).

Existing literature indicates that private schools in East Jerusalem strike a "dynamic balance" between their educational and national roles and their responsibilities as private institutions, relying on tuition fees as a primary revenue source while maintaining supportive social policies (Lexki, 2023).

3. Methodology

The research methodology used to investigate how private schools in East Jerusalem balance their dual roles as educational institutions and private enterprises. It explains the research design, philosophical orientation, study population and sample, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations. The chosen methodology is designed to capture the complex financial, organizational, and educational dynamics of private schools operating in a politically contested and institutionally fragmented environment. We chose the qualitative method in this study because it is the most appropriate for exploring social phenomena. The case study methodology also allows for

an in-depth examination of the financial strategies, tuition policies, and educational practices of different categories of private schools in the eastern part of the city. This approach enhances understanding of the context, stakeholder perspectives, and institutional processes.

The research is guided by an interpretive epistemology that assumes that reality is socially constructed and can be best understood through the perspectives of actors operating in specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the political situation in Jerusalem and the complexities of its institutional laws, this philosophical stance enables the researcher to capture nuanced meanings, strategies, and decision-making processes. This interpretive approach is consistent with the study's objective of understanding how private schools navigate their dual institutional and economic roles.

The study population consists of private schools in East Jerusalem, including those affiliated with Islamic Waqf, Christian churches, and schools affiliated with UNRWA. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select a diverse group of 4-7 private schools with different ownerships and curricula to conduct a comparative analysis across these types. Within each school, key stakeholders were identified for data collection, including administrators, teachers, and parents, as well as representatives from governing bodies and funding agencies

Data collected by:

a) Interviews:

- The researcher conducted interviews with principals, teachers, and parents to explore their perspectives on funding, tuition policies, curricula, and challenges.
- Open-ended questions were used.
- The researcher audio-recorded the interviews and then transcribed them verbatim with explicit consent.

b) Analysis:

We examined school policy documents, tuition fees, budgets, curriculum, and reports from the Israeli and Palestinian Ministries of Education and NGOs.

c) Observations:

- During school visits, school facilities and classrooms were observed, as well as administrative practices.
- The observations focused on the school's physical conditions and interactions among its members, as well as references to donors or a country's symbol.

4. Themes and Results

4.1 Theme 1: Financial Sustainability and Resource Management in Private Schools

Interview results indicate that financial sustainability is one of the major challenges facing private schools in East Jerusalem; the majority of these schools rely on a combination of tuition fees, government support, and external donations to cover their operating expenses.

While participant accounts revealed variations in funding sources, tuition fees remained the most prevalent source across most educational institutions. These findings indicate that private schools operate within a complex equation, attempting to balance financial sustainability with the preservation of their social and educational missions amidst an unstable economic and political environment. The study revealed that private schools in East Jerusalem rely primarily on tuition fees supplemented by partial government funding and external donations while facing mounting challenges regarding fee collection, declining donations, and rising operational costs. Furthermore, the results highlighted ongoing efforts to strike a balance between maintaining financial stability and fulfilling the schools' educational and social missions.

4.2 Theme 2: Quality of the Educational Process and Factors for Enhancing

The study results indicate that educational quality is the fundamental pillar upon which private schools rely to attract students and maintain their reputations. Despite their varying professional roles, the majority of participants agreed that private schools offer a good standard of education, though this standard is influenced by various factors related to teachers, resources, curricula, and the educational environment.

The results indicate that the quality of education in private schools stems from the interplay of several factors, including teacher competence, resource availability, institutional discipline, and the ability to leverage modern technology to enhance learning.

Consequently, the study revealed that educational quality is a primary driver for families choosing private schools, with participants linking quality to teacher competence, the availability of educational technology, school discipline, and academic monitoring of students. The findings also showed that limited financial resources can, at times, negatively impact the quality of educational services.

The results also indicate that the quality of education in private schools does not depend solely on curricula or technology, but is also linked to human resources, funding, and the overall educational environment.

4.3 Theme 3: The Reality of Teachers and the Professional Environment

Interviews revealed that teachers view themselves as the cornerstone of the educational process; however, they face professional and financial challenges that affect their job satisfaction and career stability. Low salaries compared to those at other educational institutions were frequently cited.

The findings indicate that the professional environment in private schools combines a high level of teacher commitment and a sense of institutional belonging with challenges regarding salaries, professional development, and incentives; this makes investing in teachers a fundamental necessity for ensuring the sustainability of educational quality. The results revealed that teachers face various challenges such as low salaries, inadequate incentives, and limited opportunities for promotion and

professional development, despite some feeling a sense of belonging to the educational institution and satisfaction with the school environment.

The results highlight the importance of investing in teachers as the most influential factor in the quality of education, particularly in educational environments facing complex political and economic challenges.

4.4 Theme 4: Political Influences and Cultural Identity

Interview results indicate that the political environment in East Jerusalem directly and indirectly influences the operations of private schools. Educational and administrative policies impact curricula, the freedom of educational practice, the stability of educational institutions, and even the cultural and national identities that these schools strive to preserve. Participants from various backgrounds acknowledged the significant political pressures private schools face in their day-to-day operations.

Interviews revealed the commitment of private schools to their role in preserving cultural and national identity. This is evident in the continued teaching of the Palestinian curriculum or elements thereof despite various pressures, as well as in the institutions' dedication to instilling a sense of cultural and national belonging in their students. These findings demonstrate that private schools serve not only an educational function but also play a cultural and national role linked to preserving Palestinian identity in Jerusalem.

The study's findings reveal a clear impact of Israeli policies on the operations of private schools, whether through interference in curricula, censorship of educational content, influence on the stability of teaching staff, or the imposition of pressures regarding the institutions' educational and cultural identity.

The results indicate that private schools in Jerusalem play not only an educational role but also a cultural and national one, centered on preserving Palestinian identity amidst a high-pressure political environment.

4.5 Theme 5: Educational Equity and Community Partnership

The study results revealed a complex relationship between private education and the principle of educational equity, as private schools attempt to balance the need to cover operating costs with ensuring that economically disadvantaged groups have access to their educational services. Participants' views varied regarding the extent to which schools have succeeded in achieving this balance.

The results also indicated that private schools play a significant societal role that extends beyond the mere provision of educational services; however, high costs remain a factor limiting the full realization of educational equity. The findings revealed a gap between the quality of educational services offered by private schools and the ability of all families to access them, as high tuition fees posed a barrier for many families, despite the availability of scholarship programs, fee waivers, and financial assistance options. The study also confirmed that private schools play an important societal role; however,

achieving educational equity requires further supportive programs to ensure that disadvantaged groups have access to quality education.

4.6 Theme 6: Governance and Foresight for the Future of Private Education

Interview results indicate that governance and decision-making issues are closely linked to the future of private schools in East Jerusalem. While the data revealed variations in management styles across institutions, most participants highlighted the importance of institutional leadership capable of addressing mounting economic and political challenges.

The results reflect a tension between factors ensuring continuity and those posing threats; while private schools maintain their educational standing and continue to see societal demand, mounting political and economic pressures raise fundamental questions regarding the form and future of private education in Jerusalem in the coming years. The findings also indicate that the future of these schools is closely linked to their ability to enhance governance, management, and strategic planning systems, as participants highlighted challenges related to centralized decision-making, weak long-term planning, and overlapping authority within some institutions.

This indicates that the future of private schools in East Jerusalem appears linked to their ability to strengthen institutional governance, develop more sustainable funding strategies, and adapt to rapid political and educational shifts.

5. Conclusions

In addressing the study's primary question, the results indicate that private schools rely on a mix of funding sources, including tuition fees, government support, and external donations and grants. Despite the need to maintain financial stability and ensure operational continuity, these schools do not operate solely on a commercial profit-driven basis; rather, they strive to uphold their educational and social missions. This is evidenced by the provision of fee waivers for orphans, scholarships, and flexible payment options such as installment plans for low-income families. These practices demonstrate that the schools seek to strike a balance between the financial imperatives of survival as private entities and their social responsibilities as educational institutions serving the local community.

The results also indicate that tuition fees constitute the primary source of school funding; however, school administrations recognize that high fees may limit access to private education for certain groups. Consequently, they adopt flexible policies including discounts, scholarships, and installment plans in an effort to alleviate the financial burden on families while maintaining the institution's operational viability. This finding reveals that fee policies are not based solely on economic considerations but are also influenced by the social and educational objectives the schools aim to achieve.

Furthermore, the results indicate that private schools strive to maintain high educational standards by investing in teachers, technology, infrastructure, and school discipline. However, this commitment sometimes faces financial constraints, as funding difficulties impact the ability to upgrade facilities, increase teacher salaries, or expand educational programs. Consequently, schools attempt to strike a balance between controlling expenses and upholding the quality of education and the institution's reputation.

The study also revealed that private schools do not view themselves merely as commercial ventures, but rather as institutions with educational, cultural, and national missions. This is evident in their commitment to preserving identity, supporting students in need, and maintaining the delivery of quality education despite financial and political challenges. At the same time, sustaining this mission requires effective financial management and the ability to secure the necessary resources to ensure the institution's long-term viability.

Overall, the study's findings indicate that private schools in East Jerusalem strike a dynamic balance between their roles as educational institutions and as self-funded private entities. This balance is evident in their reliance on tuition fees as a primary revenue source while simultaneously maintaining social policies that support economically disadvantaged groups and, in their efforts, to uphold educational quality and academic standards despite financial and political pressures. Furthermore, the results show that these schools do not operate solely on a profit-driven basis; rather, they function within a model that combines financial sustainability with a commitment to their educational, social, and cultural missions. Consequently, balancing these roles remains an ongoing challenge that lies at the core of private school operations in East Jerusalem.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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